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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3025
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 7698
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 6627
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2116
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 7895
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 3926
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 2453
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 3183
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 004739

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SUBJECT: MGPK01: SITREP 07, AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD: MIXED
MESSAGES ON ELECTIONS; MEDIA RESTRICTIONS CONTINUE

REF: ISLAMABAD 4727

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: As of 1200 local time, mainly peaceful lawyers' protests occurring in Islamabad, Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta. Following a conversation with Ambassador last night, Bhutto said that Musharraf would not commit to a timetable to have elections, doff his uniform, lift the state of emergency, or reconstitute the Election Commission. Restrictions on some broadcast media remain, and Public Affairs Counselor demarched Minister Durrani last night to reiterate our position that cable operators must immediately be allowed to resume transmitting news channels. Approximately 50 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan activists remain under house arrest in Lahore. Pakistan papers highlight President Bush's comments and news that the Defense Consultative Group was postponed. The Dutch announced that they would suspend aid to the GOP, but are evaluating how that might be implemented. All mission offices are operating normally. End summary.

12. (C) Benazir Bhutto called Ambassador last night after the PPP leader talked with Musharraf. Bhutto noted a pleasant and improved atmosphere with Musharraf. Bhutto told Ambassador that Musharraf would not commit to a timetable to have elections, doff his uniform, lift the state of emergency, or reconstitute the Election Commission. Bhutto's contacts told her that Musharraf had made a decision to postpone the elections for six months. This view is becoming more common and a range of mission contacts have told us that elections will be pushed back six months. Ambassador relayed to Bhutto that holding elections on time was our highest priority and that we were concerned about Prime Minister Aziz's public remarks on Sunday that elections might not be held for up to a year. Bhutto did not mention any planned PPP demonstrations.

13. (SBU) Pakistan officials have publicly conveyed a mixed message about when elections will occur. Prime Minister Aziz said publicly on Sunday that elections might not occur for a year; yesterday he publicly said that elections would be held on schedule and that Parliament would be convened tomorrow (which clears the way for January elections). Attorney General Malik Abdul Qayyum publicly said that assemblies would be dissolved by 15 November and elections would be held within 60 days. Punjab Chief Minister Pervaiz Elahi said

yesterday that there was no plan to extend the term of the elected assemblies, implying that elections would occur in January.

14. (C) Public Affairs Counselor met with Minister of Information Durrani Tuesday evening to deliver a demarche reiterating our earlier statement that cable operators must immediately be allowed to resume transmitting news channels. Durrani implied that the GOP is looking for a face-saving way out of the broadcast restrictions -- early enough that public dissatisfaction about the news blackout does not boil over, but with the restrictions in place long enough to make the point to broadcasters and the international community that the GOP will not be bullied. Durrani said that if broadcasters agree to abide by the provisions of the amended broadcasting ordinance, they will be allowed back on the air. Public Affairs Counselor asked if there was room for negotiation in the provisions of the amended ordinance, but Durrani was noncommittal.

15. (C) CG Lahore reported this morning (local time) that the GOP has not lifted house arrest restrictions for the approximately 50 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan activists detained since Sunday.

16. (U) Former Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry remains under house arrest. Through an intermediary, he publicly criticized the provisional constitutional order (PCO) as "unfounded, unconstitutional, and illegal."

17. (U) All Pakistani papers reported President Bush's exhortation that Musharraf hold elections and take off his uniform. Pakistani papers also reported that the US

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suspended defense talks with Pakistan. Pakistan's English paper of record reported that DOD Undersecretary for Policy Edelman canceled his trip to Pakistan and that "Washington may also review its defense assistance to Islamabad."

18. (C) The Dutch DCM told us that the Ministry of Development Cooperation suspended aid to the GOP for the time being, but was evaluating how that might be implemented. The Dutch DCM said he is seeking clarification from the Hague on how long the suspension will last and what it means; the DCM said they were directed to cut-off aid to the government of Pakistan, but 80% of their assistance goes to NGOs and 9% goes to multilaterals, so the restrictions may well be meaningless. The DCM said he hopes to continue supporting some projects. The Pakistan media reported the Canadian Foreign Affairs Ministry in Ottawa advised its citizens not to travel to Pakistan because of the imposition of a state of emergency.

19. (U) Police and GOP officials attempted to block distribution of an evening paper in Karachi yesterday (as reported reftel), but the management was ultimately able to distribute the paper. The GOP continues to block the transmission of some private TV news stations. Pakistan's paper of record reported this morning that people were lining up to buy satellite dishes to circumvent government restrictions on broadcast media. Newspapers were distributed today with no problems. Phone service continues to function normally.

PATTERSON